

"THE PLEASURE AND PAIN OF FATHERHOOD, I."

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden

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Texts for the Sermon: Mark 1:1-5 and Galatians 6:1

Two Personal notes of reflection.

I want to take a few moments to share with you two personal things. First, I want to thank you for all your prayers for Todd, Reed and me as we traveled over 2300 miles in five days to Anchorage. I want to give glory to God by telling you an answer to your prayers.

It rained the whole trip, there was water everywhere, so much so that unknown to us it washed out over ten sections of the Alaska Highway. On Wednesday and Thursday we decided to push on a little further than planned and as a result got as far as Beaver Creek, Yukon near the Alaska border. The next morning when we got to the border the border guard asked us how we got there because the road just behind us was washed out. We didn't know anything about the wash outs. God was very gracious and protected us and provided for us all the way.

Your prayers for us and each other matter. Your prayers for yourself and your family matter. Our Heavenly Father delights in glorifying Himself in response to answering your prayers. Pray, your prayers matter.

My second personal note is about something very significant about today. Today is my 40th birthday, the 40th anniversary of my spiritual birth. In June of 1972 my family lived in Wichita, Kansas and my father was the state director of Young Life. For the month of June that year my dad was assigned to be the head camp counselor at Young Life's remote restore Malibu Club up in BC. He took the whole family along. The first week I was a regular camper. Unknown to me my dad in the counselor meetings asked all the campers to pray for his oldest son to become a Christian. On June 10th I surrendered my life to Christ. When my little nine year old sister heard about it, she told my mom she wanted to do the same thing the next day.

In the incredible providence of God my sister Susie is the head women's counselor at Malibu this June and she helped make it possible for Phama and I to be adult guests there from this next week and my brother Andrew and his wife Claire. So forty years later my brother and sister and I with our spouses get reunite at Malibu and my sister and I get to celebrate a very spiritual significant moment in the place it happen. It is pure gift from God and I give Him all the glory for making it possible. We will be gone from Thursday to Thursday.

Introduction.

Since I am not going to be here next Sunday which is Father's Day, I have decided to preach my Father's Day sermon today. I have been looking forward to this since I attended a pastor's conference in January that dealt with the theme of men and masculinity and fatherhood. Two pastors especially got to the heart of fatherhood and got to my father's heart, Doug Wilson and John Piper. I am borrowing and adding to and passing on what I learned from them.

The first thing the first speaker said was that there's not a single functional family in the entire Bible, not one. Every home we encounter in the Bible is dysfunctional. Sin has laid waste to

every human family and all of us come from broken homes, some more than others, but all broken. And that definitely includes the one I came from and the one I created and have.

Nothing like traveling 2300 miles with a couple of sons to remind a dad of his sins and the sins he has passed down from one generation to another. Without a doubt the most painful experiences of my life are seeing my sins in the mirror of my sons.

What I want to do this morning is say some things I wish I had heard 30 years ago and not just heard but taken to heart and put into practice.

If we want to know what fatherhood looks like and sounds like and smells like and tastes like, we should turn to the original designer, the first architect, the best example and model and look in the book He wrote.

I'm serious about this. The older I get and the more I read and study the Bible the more amazed I am at how it really does have the answer to all of life's questions and issues. It's the most supremely practical book. It contains God's wisdom for doing life. If there is a question we need to know the answer to, that answer will be found in Scripture.

Scripture teaches us everything we need to know about fathering and mothering. When you boil it down to the basics, fathering and mothering is love and correction, tender and tough, grace and guidance, delight and discipline.

That's what I want to focus on this morning and the next time I preach, delight and discipline, or pleasure and pain. From Scripture I want to show every father here these two aspects of godly, Biblical, masculine fatherhood. By the way, this has broader application beyond sons and daughters, to grandsons and granddaughters, nieces and nephews, and to all the children we relate to in this covenant community.

This morning we will stop with the first half of what I am calling the pleasure and pain of fatherhood, or the delight and discipline of being a dad.

Scripture shows us how to love, how to show our delight in our children.

From Mark 1 we see *six ways* the Father shows His love for Jesus, and six ways the Father shows us how to love our children. "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased."

1. The Father was present, He showed up. He was not absent.

Dads, show up. Be there. First and foremost be at dinner. Yes, there are exceptions, but do everything in your power to make them exceptions and not the rule. If you do shift work, then be at breakfast, some meal when you are together face to face daily. Be at the games and the recitals. Be present. Don't just hear about everything through mom later.

2. The Father made His presence felt. He wasn't just present, He was engaged. Fathers can be present and detached, or present but uninterested, present but at work.

Dads, while you are there engage. Be emotionally tuned in, and not tuned out. Don't be there but on your phone or checking e-mail. When I am in my office at home, I keep the door open and make it clear that I am interruptible by my family. I want to model what God is like. We

can interrupt God any time of day or night can't we. I want my kids to know that God is like that, because I am like that.

3. The Father made His presence known and heard, He spoke. He was verbal. He was not silent. He intentionally communicated with His Son.

Dads speak up, talk, ask questions, initiate. Women are generally so much better at this. My wife as worked many years to move me past one word answers and grunts. Wives, help you husbands with this and be patient. Husbands, receive and welcome their help, that's why God gave her to you, to be a helpmate. And believe me, I know how much we need it.

50 hours in a van is tough to fill up, but I tried to ask questions, to find things out, to learn more about Todd's work and life and Reed's. I had to work to be intentional. It was hard work and it didn't always work, but I worked at being intentional. Dads, move past the strong silent type, to the strong, verbally engaged type. Don't be lazy, don't leave all the verbal lifting to someone else. Make your presence known through good communication.

4. The Father identified with His Son. This is my Son. I claim Him as my own, I am not ashamed of him.

Dads, every chance you get let it be known, "this is my son, this is my daughter." They are mine and there's no embarrassment, shame or guilt. Parents with handicapped children learn this very quickly and don't you ever mess with that. Other people may feel embarrassment, but never them. Just like that mamma grizzly with the two cubs we saw, those cubs were hers and she jealously guarded them and her relationship with them.

There may be a season when our kids are embarrassed of us and not want to identify with us. That's their problem, just make sure there is never a time when we don't show our love by identifying with them and showing and expressing our love in this way, no matter what they do.

5. The Father expressed His love. "This is my beloved Son. I love you."

Dads, don't let your kids go through life saying they knew you loved them even though you never actually said those words. Don't say that it goes without saying. No, say it. Say it over and over and over again. Say it when they don't love you back, say it when they just grunt or ignore you, say it again and again and again. The Heavenly Father repeated Himself with Jesus.

6. The Father expressed His pleasure, He praised His son. "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased. I delight in you."

This is the pinnacle. Dads, praise your kids. Praise them for any and every accomplishment, for small things and big things. Honor them with your words of praise. Tell them how proud you are of them. Tell them how much you like them and how neat you think they are. Give them your admiration, your applause, your approval.

Our children hear so much displeasure from us dads. They hear it in our tone of voice, in our frustration and irritation, our annoyance and impatience, our anger and swearing, our criticisms and disapproval. Every word like that should be countered with ten words of approval, pleasure, even delight.

There it is, the Father God showing us the very heart of fatherhood. The very first time the God the Father speaks out loud in the NT and what we hear is the ultimate expression of fatherhood, fatherly pleasure with our children.

“If you hold the title father then this is your job description, these are your marching orders, this is what you are to do. Imitate this.” (Doug Wilson).

Yes, if you haven't been doing any of these things it's going to feel weird for a while, but don't let that stop you, don't let the father of lies try to defeat you or distract you or keep you from trying. Resist the father of lies and follow the Father of Truth. (Wilson again).

“This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.”

Application and Conclusion.

Let me close with two final points of application.

The power of a father's repentance.

Dads if you feel like you have totally blown it in this department, totally missed the boat, completely failed, well guess what? Good news. Our Father in heaven is waiting for us at the end of the driveway, waiting for us to come home and start over, waiting to show us how.

We have all failed. We have all failed and fallen short of the glory of God. There's not a single functional family in the Bible, and there isn't a single one here.

So the first thing we all need to acknowledge is that we are sinners and we are sinful and our homes are full of sin and God has been from the beginning in the business of forgiving sin and restoring sinners and restoring relationships and restoring homes. It begins with confessing our sin and sinfulness and repenting of our sin and asking for and giving forgiveness.

Repent of your past sins and failures. Everyone knows them already. Our families have experienced our wrath, our anger, our impatience, our failure to love and our failure to discipline in a godly way. Repent.

God is not like us. He will not treat us the way we treated our own kids. He's perfect and always loving and His discipline is always loving, with the perfect balance of strict and tender, correcting and not punishing.

Repent. We can't go back but we can start right where we are. Be willing to change, and ask God to start changing you. Be patient with yourself and be humble.

When fathers fail and fall short, a powerful blessing is found in the words: “I'm sorry. I have sinned against you and hurt you. Please forgive me.”

Good fathers know they are sinners and admit it freely. They don't hide behind a cloak of power or authority or toughness and self-defense.

The power of a father's blessing.

Fathers have the power of blessing with their words. “I love you,” “I’m proud of you,” “I think you are great,” “Way to go, well done,” “I’m on your side.”

Fathers, start today, let your voice of blessing be heard. “This is my beloved son, my beloved daughter, my beloved grandson and granddaughter, with whom I am well-pleased, greatly pleased, with whom I am delighted.”